



Weekly Safety Briefings

Week 6 – Jan. 30 – Feb. 3, 2023

Choking First Aid

Introduction

Choking in the workplace, at a restaurant or at home is not an uncommon occurrence. In adults, choking most commonly occurs during mealtimes when a piece of food becomes lodged in the throat. This can be a very scary experience for the choking person as well as bystanders that may not feel equipped to help the person. This week we will provide information on basic first aid for a person who is choking so you can feel more prepared to help yourself and those around you.

Monday – Signs of Choking

Identifying the signs of choking is the first step to providing the help needed. The universal sign is hands clutched to the throat. If the person doesn't give this signal but you suspect someone is choking, look for these signs:

- Inability to talk
- Difficulty breathing or noisy breathing
- Squeaky sounds when trying to breathe
- Cough, which may either be weak or forceful
- Skin, lips and nails turning blue or dusky
- Skin that is flushed, then turns pale or bluish in color
- Loss of consciousness

Tuesday– Next Steps

Once you've identified someone is choking, the next steps are critical. If the person can cough forcefully, they should keep coughing to try and force the object out. If the person is choking and can't talk, cry or laugh forcefully, the American Red Cross recommends a "five-and-five" approach to delivering first aid:

- **Give 5 back blows.** Stand to the side and just behind a choking adult. For a child, kneel down behind. Place one arm across the person's chest for support. Bend the person over at the waist so that the upper body is parallel with the ground. Deliver five separate back blows between the person's shoulder blades with the heel of your hand.
- **Give 5 abdominal thrusts.** Perform five abdominal thrusts (also known as the Heimlich maneuver).
- **Alternate between 5 blows and 5 thrusts** until the blockage is dislodged.

*The American Heart Association doesn't teach the back blow technique, only the abdominal thrust procedures. It's OK not to use back blows if you haven't learned the technique. Both approaches are acceptable.

Wednesday – Abdominal Thrusts (Heimlich Maneuver)

Today we will discuss the details of the Heimlich maneuver. To perform abdominal thrusts (Heimlich maneuver) on someone else:

- **Stand behind the person.** Place one foot slightly in front of the other for balance. Wrap your arms around the waist. Tip the person forward slightly. If a child is choking, kneel down behind the child.
- **Make a fist with one hand.** Position it slightly above the person's navel.
- **Grasp the fist with the other hand.** Press hard into the abdomen with a quick, upward thrust — as if trying to lift the person up.
- **Perform between six and 10 abdominal thrusts** until the blockage is dislodged.

*If you are the only rescuer, perform back blow and abdominal thrusts before calling 911 for help. If another person is available, have that person call for help while you perform first aid.



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*If the person becomes unconscious, perform standard CPR with chest compressions and rescue breaths.

Thursday – What to do if You are Alone

You have not always be fortunate enough to have someone around if you are in a choking situation. In the event you are alone and begin choking you can perform a modified Heimlich maneuver on yourself following these steps:

- **Place a fist** slightly above your navel.
- **Grasp your fist** with the other hand and bend over a hard surface — a countertop or chair will do.
- **Shove your fist** inward and upward.

Friday – Open Discussion

Experiencing or witnessing a choking situation can be a very scary experience. Hopefully the tips shared this week will provide some guidance on how best to react. Today we will open it up to the group to discuss your questions and experiences.

- After the discussions this week, do you feel more equipped to help a person who is choking?
- Have you learned other methods of providing first aid in a choking situation? Please share with the group.
- Have you ever been in a choking situation or been a witness? What did you do?